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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 001572

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/16/2015
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [IN](#) [NP](#) [BT](#)
SUBJECT: RGOB REMAINS COMMITTED TO REFUGEE RETURNS

REF: A. NEW DELHI 736

[1](#)B. REED-PITOTTI EMAIL 2-16-06

Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In contrast to Bhutanese Ambassador Tshering's comments in Ref A that the RGOB may not repatriate

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any refugees, in a February 15 meeting with Poloff, Bhutanese Second Secretary Karma Thinley (Strictly Protect) stated that Thimphu remains committed to repatriating those in Category 1 and 4. However, he noted that Bhutan is concerned about security and wary of allowing Maoist sympathizers into the country. Thinley also expressed concern over where refugees in other categories would end up. In a February 16 meeting, representatives from the Netherlands, UK and Japan stated that while their governments would likely be interested in a joint visit to Thimphu to raise the refugee issue with the King, they would first need to obtain approval from their ministries. The Norwegian DCM argued on February 23 that only India has the leverage to entice Bhutan to resolve the refugee situation, but is not likely to force its neighbor to act. End Summary.

Bhutanese Ambassador Speaks for Himself

[1](#)2. (C) Bhutanese Second Secretary Karma Thinley told Poloff on February 15 that Ambassador Tshering may not have "clearly stated Bhutan's position" regarding refugee returns (Ref A). Thinley stated that, in contrast to Tshering's comments, the RGOB position on accepting Category 1 and 4 refugees has not

changed, but security concerns remain. Thinley, citing a conversation with officials in Thimphu, Bhutanese DCM Thinley Dorji and the Bhutanese DCM in New York, noted that Ambassador Tshering is a very senior member of the government and, holding such authority, often expresses his personal views without fear of reprimand from Thimphu. Thinley proffered that the Ambassador's suggestion that the RGOB was reconsidering the repatriation of any refugees is not Thimphu's official position.

13. (C) Thinley reiterated that the RGOB remains concerned about security and Maoist infiltration into Bhutan. Bhutan does not favor allowing refugees with radical beliefs into the country during the transition to democracy. Thinley highlighted the fear that the advent of political parties could allow radical groups easily to spread their extremist views, and the government would be powerless to stop them.

14. (C) Regarding the repatriation/resettlement of refugees, Karma expressed RGOB interest in the USG's willingness to accept voluntary resettlement of the "people in the camps." He inquired about next steps after the agreed-upon repatriation of Category 1 and 4 refugees, specifically referring to Category 2 and 3 refugees who do not choose resettlement or local integration. Poloff remarked that the international community has indicated a willingness to provide financial support for the integration of these people into Bhutan, however, a majority may opt for resettlement, if it is an option.

New Delhi "Bhutan Watchers" Agree Pressure is Needed

15. (C) PolOff met with representatives from the British High

NEW DELHI 00001572 002 OF 003

Commission, Embassy of the Netherlands and Japanese Embassy on February 16 to discuss possible next steps regarding the Bhutanese refugee problem. (Note: Representatives from the Danish High Commission, Norwegian Embassy, and Austrian Embassy could not attend. End Note.) PolOff outlined PRM's six month strategy, stressing the need for Bhutan to deliver acceptable terms and conditions for return and for Nepal to allow UNHCR to begin surveying the camps, and expressed hope that other interested governments would support the initiative. Second Secretary Josephine Frantzen from the Netherlands indicated her government would likely support the plan and a joint trip to Thimphu to impress upon the RGOB the need for action. Indicating that no single government, with the exception of India, has leverage to force Bhutan to begin repatriations, she remarked that a visit to Thimphu by high-level representatives from the expanded Core Working Group would be a good idea.

16. (C) British Third Secretary Caroline Wilson indicated that the UK is currently not highly engaged in the Bhutanese refugee issue, although it would likely support the PRM strategy in whatever way it could. Acknowledging that her government has a "minuscule" aid package in Bhutan of roughly 12,000 Pounds, she commented that the UK has very little leverage in Bhutan. Japanese First Secretary Yuki Sakai reported that her government also has a very small aid program in Bhutan, which is shrinking, along with Japanese aid programs worldwide. However, she indicated that the Government of Japan is interested in helping the international community engage Bhutan to find a solution to the problem. (Note: Bhutanese Ambassador Tshering is also credentialed to Tokyo, giving the Japanese here greater access to the RGOB than they might admit. End Note.)

17. (C) All attendees agreed that Bhutan is unlikely to move quickly towards a durable solution without pressure from the international community, and a joint front would be more effective in spurring Bhutanese action. Frantzen argued that the main donor countries would all have to agree to make aid conditional on the resolution of the refugee problem, in

order for the RGOB to take notice. Sakai initially indicated that she thought that Nepal was responsible for the next overture, mirroring the GOJ message in Ref B, but later agreed with PolOff that Bhutan still must deliver clear conditions for return.

Norway: No Movement Without India

¶8. (C) Norwegian DCM Lasse Johannessen told Poloff on February 23 that without stronger engagement by the GOI, pressure from other state players is unlikely to succeed in getting the Bhutanese to take action. He doubted that the GOI would be willing to act against Bhutan, commenting "if New Delhi has not taken action in Nepal regarding the Maoist insurgency, do we really expect the Indians actually to do anything on the refugee issue?" Poloff noted there might be interest in a joint donors' visit to Bhutan, and Johannessen indicated he would inquire as to whether Norway would participate. He also asked if there was a plan to send a joint delegation to Nepal to press Kathmandu to allow the UNHCR survey to begin.

¶9. (C) Reporting on the visit of Bhutanese Foreign Minister Wangchuk to Oslo, Johannessen remarked that the RGOB sounded

NEW DELHI 00001572 003 OF 003

cooperative and maintained its willingness to repatriate Category 1 and 4 refugees. However, he stated that the RGOB reiterated the demand that the GON agree in writing to the plan and on modalities to deliver the information to camp residents.

Comment: Take it to the King

¶10. (C) The Bhutanese refugee problem continues its slow march to an uncertain end. While meetings with our European colleagues are useful to develop a joint strategy, it is unlikely that a solution will be found in the near future without a direct appeal to King Wangchuck. Post suggests a senior level visit to Thimphu and in partnership with other interested government, requesting that Bhutan submit to the GON clear and acceptable conditions of return and agree to the repatriation of Category 1 and 4 refugees and urging the King to devote himself personally to the solution of this impasse.

¶11. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)
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